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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that the experience of most ethnic immigrant groups, including Greek-Americans, who came to the United States involved a denial of ethnicity and culture in favor of conformity with the dominant Anglo-American culture. The experience of Greek immigrants in the United States is examined, including such aspects as the role of the Greek Orthodox Church and Greek immigrants fear of blacks. The pride in ethnicity is consistent with the values represented by U.S. constitutional principles; one need not deny one's native culture in order to be a true U.S. citizen. (DB)

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THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION:

THE GREEK-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Paper presented at the Saloutos International Conference on the Greek-American Experience, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 13, 1989

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THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION:

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INTRODUCTION

The article below summarizes some of the key ideas in a work on the social psychology of immigration currently under preparation. It was inspired by the ideas in a book on multiethnic education by James A. Banks (1). By "happy" coincidence, the author was asked to use Banks' book in the fall of 1988 to teach a graduate class on the cultural foundations of education at Chicago State University. The book had already been ordered in the university bookstore by the time the author was notified of his teaching assignment. It turned out the book opened (to paraphrase Freud) a new window in the author's house of "half-conscious" ideas just waiting to be expressed. The decision to begin writing on this topic came as a result of his reading a series of newspaper articles on the Greek-American experience, written by Northern Illinois University sociology professor Yorgos Kourvetaris in 1988 (2).

PERCEPTION OF GREEKS IN THE UNITED STATES

Outline of this section:

1. Opposite views: "It's all Greek to me" (Greek as funny and strange) versus "Greeks conquered Rome with their culture" (Roman admiration of Greek culture)
2. Non-pluralistic society=no understanding of Greeks

GENERAL CATEGORIES OF CONCEPTS COVERED IN THE PAPER:

Identity and adjustment:

- -- Alienation
- -- Self-hate
- -- Insecurity

Racism

- -- Discrimination
- -- Nativism
- -- Internalization of Dominant values

Ethnicity
Patriotism
Nationalism
Immigration

- -- Culture
- -- Education
- -- Melting Pot idea
- -- Multilingualism
- -- Church and Religion
  - Centralization-Decentralization
  - Role in Greek-American Community

Medievalism
Paradigms for Research
Interdisciplinary Studies on Ethnicity

OUTLINE OF CONCEPTS IN PAPER

A. Culture-U.S.A.
B. Psychology of Immigration
C. Anglo-Greek
D. Fear of Blacks
E. Albert Memmi's theory of dominated man
F. Greek-American culture
G. Role of Church
H. Pluralism and Assimilation

ANGLO CULTURE AS "ETHNIC"

Some people may consciously or unconsciously perceive everything non-Anglo as "ethnic," not seeing that Anglo, too, is ethnic, only historically more dominant than other ethnic groups. In fact, only some years ago the Anglo culture had so dominated the cultural landscape that many people confused being American with being Anglo (3).

ANGLO-CONFORMISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Most social scientists agree that the dominant culture in this country has historically been the culture of the Anglo-American ethnic group (4). Many early Greek immigrants adopted this culture to survive (5). For some their original ethnicity became an empty ceremonial shell too brittle, philosophically, to outlast their more meaningful cultural conversion into the Anglo culture. Their adopted Anglo culture became increasingly crystallized, finally replacing their Greek ethnicity with a new Anglo-American ethnic identity. I submit that this metamorphosis from being non-Anglo ethnically, to becoming Anglo culturally, has helped perpetuate the dominance of the ethnic Anglo culture in this country in spite the constant influx of ethnically non-Anglo peoples.

In a recent newspaper article on the Greek-American experience, professor Kourvetaris stated that "Unity within diversity is more compatible with the American ideal of democracy and the American dream than unity within conformity to an Anglo-Saxon model" (Greek Star, Sept. 8, 1988). The

question may be raised, Is it necessary that one convert to Anglo culture to be a "true" American? Professor Kourvetaris seems to imply that it is not, as we can have "unity within diversity." What does "unity within diversity" mean? Let us see what it is NOT. It is not Anglo-conformity, or conformity to any other ethnic group. If conform we must, it is, according to James Banks and other writers, conformity only to the principles underlying the American Constitution, such as, justice and equality for all (6).

Ironically, this conformity to the American Constitution "guarantees" the right of every ethnic group to NON-CONFORMITY to another ethnic group. It follows that in the context of the principles underlying the American Constitution, being "American" is non-compatible with with forcing an ethnic group to conform to, or culturally convert into, the culture of another ethnic group. Ideally, the American Constitution may be seen as an antidote to "ethnic imprerialism" in the United States. This doesn't mean that no one should be ALLOWED to become Anglo in America, but only that no one should be FORCED, through social or economic pressure, to conform to any one ethnic culture, in this case, to the ethnic Anglo culture.

It follows from what has been said so far that the more one degrades other people's ethnicity or culture, even if he himself was originally a member of the group he is now degrading, the further away he moves from following the principles embodied in the Constitution. If being a true American means following the principles embodied in the Constitution, then the more one degrades other people's ethnicity, the further away he moves from being a true American.

AMERICANS AS HYPHENATED CITIZENS

A Greek-American may be as American for loving his Greek ethnic culture, as someone else who voluntarily rejected his ethnic culture and adopted, instead, the culture of only the dominant Anglo ethnic group. The "hyphenated American" may love other ethnic groups as much as he does his own, while in common with all Americans he, too, may feel strongly attached to the overarching American Constitutional values (7). His may be a truly democratic lifestyle, as he may neither expect all others to adopt Greek culture to count as "true" Americans, nor treat non-Greek ethnics worse than he does Greeks. His may be the

true American approach--a belief in freedom and dignity for all. His non-authoritarian approach may be proof that America works--that in the long run democratic principle can overcome undemocratic, because racist or ethnic-chauvinist, practices. A hyphenated American, therefore, can be as "American," and as patriotic, as the principles underlying the U.S. Constitution allow.

In the past almost all American presidents were of Anglo or anglicized ethnic backgrounds. As D. J. Palumbo has shown us in his book AMERICAN POLITICS, past American presidents were not only overhwelmingly of ethnic English background, or of non-English background who nevertheless converted into Anglo culture, but many were even related by blood (8). Seen from that angle, America, or at least the Office of the American Presidency, may have been more "ethnic" in the past, because so Anglo-restricted, than it can ever become in the future because of people of non-Anglo backgrounds running for President. Those who see a non-Anglo presidential candidate as an "ethnic" candidate may have internalized the idea that only being Anglo is being "pure" American. Consequently, they confuse being American, with being Anglo, and therefore consider only non-Anglos as "ethnic."

THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGY OF ANGLO-CONFORMISM

Many immigrants came to this country when it was overwhemingly Anglo socially, culturally, and politically. To succeed (get a job, find friends, advance socially), one had to adopt the ethnic Anglo culture, which also explains why it was much easier for whites to succeed, than it was for non-whites whose outlook was the least Anglo-like.

Public education was built around the "melting pot" concept (9). Translated, this meant that all cultures felt strong social pressure to "melt" inside an Anglo, rather than non-Anglo, cultural pot. The emphasis was on cultural homogeneity, as seen also from the attempts by Noah Webster to "americanize" even the English language, than on cultural or multilingual pluralism (10). Consequently, many immigrants expunged their own culture, or kept it barely alive through their private schools or churches where they maintained at least a semblance of their original ethnic culture.

During this process of cultural "exchange," some

immigrants succeeded in becoming more "Anglo-Saxon" in a predominantly Anglo world than the Anglos themselves were. If they were second-class citizens in the old country, because poor or oppressed, they were now determined to become Anglo to survive in an Anglo-dominated society. For example, many Greek-Americans anglicized their names, avoided teaching their children Greek, or bellitled the manners of the "new" immigrants (11). If immigrant experiences of the Greeks and other peoples in this country prove anything, it is that many people, especially if previously oppressed, will not hesitate to sacrifice their cultural heritage to social and economic advancement.

ANGLOGREEKS

In spite the complete cultural and ethnic "facelift" experienced by some Greek immigrants, most retained at least some memory of Greek culture. They became anglicized Hellenes, or "AngloGreeks" (my term). Unfortunately, some went to such length in psychologically denying their own Greek culture that they started degrading their Greek roots, projecting their fear of themselves (or of their Greekness) on their fellow Greeks. For example, to further distance themselves from their Greek roots they derogatorily referred to recent Greek immigrants as "displaced persons," or "DPs." Some Anglo-Americans of Greek ancestry even developed, by extension of their wanting desperately to become Anglo, a racist attitude toward every non-Anglo ethnic group. Unfortunately, by discriminating against non-white and non-Anglo groups, they became too racist to be true "Americans."

FEAR OF BLACKS

Some Greek immigrants have a pathological fear of black people. Their fear of blacks is shown from their evacuating en masse whole neighborhoods at the first black family that moved in (12). This fear of blacks may be the result of their immigrant experiences as an oppressed people trying desperately to disassociate themselves from everything that reminded them of their own lower-class status or poverty in the old country, or during their first years in the new world (13). Conceivably, they could, or should, have developed a brotherly affinity toward other oppressed peoples, such as the blacks, as they were once also discriminated against, or oppressed or even "slaves." (The Greeks were considered an "enslaved" people

under the Turkish occupation.)

ALBERT MEMMI ON THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

In his well known psychological study of the oppresed, DOMINATED MAN, the philosopher-sociologist Albert Memmi showed that those who are politically oppressed risk becoming, in their struggle to gain status, just as, or even more oppressive than their old oppressors once were (14). In their efforts to gain power, the oppressed "internalize" the values of the powerful. In fact, they may internalize the values of the dominant group so well that they in turn may become staunch defenders of the values of the dominant group that once oppressed them.

Memmi's analysis may be applied to Greek immigrants who were once oppressed in their own country or in the United States. It could be argued that many Greek immigrants who converted to the Anglo culture so internalized Anglo-values that they continued defending Anglo values even if the social circumstances that had once required them to be Anglo-like to survive had changed. They tried so hard to "assimilate" into the Anglo mainstream that they "over-internalized" the dominant Anglo culture. Some became more "Anglo" than American, and certainly more than is required to be a "good" American according to the U. S. Constitution.

GREEK CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

As a result of the anglicization of the Greek immigrants, many Greek immigrants developed a peculiarly ritualistic or "for appearances only" Greek-American culture. These immigrants sacrificed the substance of Greek culture, to keeping only a facade of Greek culture, such as, church attendance, folkdances, Greek food, ethnic parades, and the like. There was no attempt made to analyze in-depth the meaning of Greek culture, or to explain its symbols, or to study its history, literature or art. Such in-depth cultural plunge may have been psychologically too difficult to bear while simultaneously trying to convert to Anglo, not to mention practically almost impossible in the absence of qualified scholars, or of a supportive social or political milieu. Their new "showcase" Greek culture was so devoid of careful analysis or study of one's ethnic heritage, that it was no longer psychologically threatening to Anglo-converted Greeks. It was also politically

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"safe" from an Anglo point of view, and by extension from the view of the completely anglicized Greeks, as it lacks the ideology of a movement capable of challenging the ethnic Anglo dominance in American society (15).

THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Many Greek immigrants substituted Greekness with membership in the Greek Orthodox Church. Although strong in the Greek contryside, the Greek church was never so central in 19th and 20th centuries Greece as it has become in the Greek-American community in the United States (16). Since becoming a new nation the United States has consciously and systematically promoted religious pluralism which made it easier for different religions to peacefully coexist and flourish, than it did for different ethnic groups to keep their secular cultures in an Anglo-dominated society. Consequently, many Greek immigrants to this country found it much easier to maintain their religion, than to preserve their secular ethnic culture. Discouraged from maintaining their secular ethnic culture, they turned to their religion with a vengeance, building Greek churches everywhere there were enough employed Greeks to finance them. I submit that this is why we have today the seemingly unexplainable, if not contradictory phenomenon of completely anglicized third and fourth generation Greeks zealously supporting the Greek Orthodox Church.

I submit that many Greek immigrants channeled their love for their cultural heritage, which they felt they had to give up in an Anglo-dominated society, toward their Greek churches (17). Where in the old country they loved all components of their cultural heritage, including their churches, about equally, social circumstances in an Anglo-dominated but religiously pluralistic society led them to eventually channel all their love for their ethnic heritage into support for their churches. This is why Greek churches in the United States are more than just places of worship, they are veritable small nations, complete with Greek schools, large halls for lunches, dinners, dances, and conferences, annual festivals and ceremonies, communal and camouflaged political activities and elections, sport events and study groups, and many intricately organized youth and adult clubs with national and local officers, and even church-sponsored "Olympic games" (18).

Greek immigrants built their churches large enough to fit

their culture. What the Anglo-dominated world outside their churches denied them, their churches accepted. Unfortunately, the secular didn't always mix well with the religious, with the result being that much of the church-preserved Greek "culture" was either a "sanitized" version of their original secular culture, or degenerated into a "dead" ritual devoid of its original meaning, and therefore almost unrecognizable (although new waves of Greek immigrants kept testing the ability of the church to expand to include ever more of secular Greek cultural characteristics). By giving Greek culture a roof, the Greek church kept its FORM, much as the Greek church of the Byzantine Empire had done for ancient Greek "pagan" culture, but risked destroying its SUBSTANCE. Much of church-preserved Greek culture is like a well-kept but dead butterfly inside a thick exhibit glass--especially regarding controversial folk ideals and literary and social figures--than it is a live movement capable of evolving, or of shaping people's lives.

We may speculate that as the United States becomes more ethnically pluralistic, meaning, more accepting of ethnic differences, Greek immigrants may find it easier to express their secular culture outside the Greek church, through secular schools and cultural centers and organizations--as is in fact presently happening among Greek-Americans in the Chicago area, where several secular cultural organizations have sprouted in the last four or five years.

ETHNIC CHAUVINISM VERSUS ETHNIC PLURALISM

Ethnic chauvinism is the idea that one ethnic/cultural group is superior to another, and therefore must rule over others. Ethnic chauvinism may fan the flames of racism and social inequality, and may therefore be not only un-American, in a theoretical sense, but also a real threat to the survival of an open society. To be truly democratic a society should be ethnically pluralistic, meaning, a society where all ethnic/cultural groups are allowed to contribute to its cultural fabric, and to share equally in governing the nation (19).

THE NEW PLURALISM

According to several observers of life in America, there has emerged in recent years, spearheaded by the the civil rights movement, a new pride in being "ethnic" (20). We have

come to realize that what makes an American is not his being Anglo, but his adherence to the overarching Constitutional principles that drive this country. Consequently, a Greek or any other "ethnic" need no longer deny his "native" culture to be a true American, as he can be a proud hyphenated American. A citizen of this country is in fact more likely to love this country if he is NOT denied what the U.S. Constitution presumably protects--his freedom and human dignity--than if he is made to either feel ashamed he is not Anglo, or downright guilty of crimes he never committed if he is not even white.

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10. ROBERT L. CHURCH, EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTERPRETIVE HISTORY, NEW YORK: THE FREE PRESS, 1976, PP. 16-20.

11. SEE THE CHAPTER "SPIRO T. ANAGNOSTOPOULOS: REMEMBRANCE OF HUMILIATIONS PAST," IN NOVAK, RISE OF UNMELTABLE ETHNICS, PP.116-134. SEE, ALSO, SALOUTOS, GREEKS IN THE U.S., CHAPTER 4.

12. BASED ON INFORMATION GATHERED PERSONALLY BY THE AUTHOR, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO A THRIVING GREEK NEIGHBORHOOD SURROUNDING THE ASSUMPTION GREEK-ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CHICAGO, AROUND HIGHWAY 290 AND CENTRAL AVENUE, WHEN THE FIRST BLACK FAMILIES STARTED MOVING IN. WHILE SERVING AS PRINCIPAL OF THE GREEK-AMERICAN DAY K-8 SCHOOL NEXT TO THE CHURCH, I WAS TOLD BY CERTAIN ELDERS WHO KNEW THE AREA WELL THAT THE GREEK RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS DISAPPEARED ALMOST OVERNIGHT ONCE THE BLACKS STARTED MOVING IN. PEOPLE SOLD THEIR HOMES AND BUSINESSES AT A LOSS SO THEY CAN MOVE OUT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. TODAY THE CHURCH STANDS ALONE AS THE ONLY REMAINING "GREEK" INSTITUTION IN THE MIDST OF A BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD, WITH MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH COMING TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD EITHER FOR SUNDAY SERVICE, OR TO PICK UP OR DROP OFF THEIR CHILDREN AT THE GREEK SCHOOL ADJACENT TO THE CHURCH.

13. SEE SALOUTOS, GREEKS IN THE U.S., CHAPTER 3 ON "EARLY YEARS;" AND MOSKOS, GREEK AMERICANS, CHAPTER 1 ON "THE GREEK COMES TO AMERICA."

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16. ON THE ROLE OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES, SEE SALOUTOS, GREEKS IN THE U.S., CHAPTER 5 ON "FOR GOD AND COUNTRY," AND CHAPTER 6 ON "THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH: THE BEGINNINGS;" MOSKOS, GREEK AMERICANS, CHAPTER 3 ON "THE GREEK AMERICAN COMMUNITY;" AND NICON D. PATRINACOS, "THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE EVOLVING GREEK AMERICAN COMMUNITY," IN PSOMIADES AND SCOURBY, GREEK AMERICAN COMMUNITY. SEE ALSO THOMAS BURGESS, GREEKS IN AMERICA: AN ACCOUNT OF THEIR COMING, PROGRESS, CUSTOMS, LIVING, AND ASPIRATIONS, BOSTON: SHERMAN, FRENCH, 1913, ESPECIALLY CHAPTER 7 ON "THE CHURCH OF THE GREEKS;" AND J. P. XENIDES, THE GREEKS IN AMERICA, NEW YORK: GEORGE H. DORAN, 1922, PP. 118-135.

17. SALOUTOS' THESIS THAT THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH BECAME SO IMPORTANT FOR THE GREEK AMERICAN COMMUNITY BECAUSE IT WAS SEEN AS ALSO FULFILLING THE NATIONALISTIC ASPIRATIONS OF THE GREEK

IMMIGRANTS DOESN'T EXPLAIN WHY THE GREEKS DIDN'T ORGANIZE SECULAR INSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH TO SO EXPRESS THEIR APSIRATIONS. SEE SALOUTOS, GREEKS IN THE U.S., P.255. OUR THESIS IN THE PAPER IS THAT THE CHURCH CAME TO EMBODY ALSO NATIONALISTIC-CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS BECAUSE THE OUTER WORLD SUPPRESSED THEM.

18. CHURCH-ORGANIZED OLYMPIC GAMES RECEIVE WIDE PUBLICITY IN THE GREEK-AMERICAN PRESS IN CHICAGO, ESPECIALLY IN THE NEWSPAPER "THE GREEK STAR," WHICH IS OWNED BY A GROUP OF CHURCH-SUPPORTING GREEK AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN.

19. SEE THE OUTLINE OF PLURALISTIC THEORIES IN BANKS, MULTIETHNIC EDUCATION, CHAPTER 8; AND THE DISCUSSION OF SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES IN GLAZER AND MOYNIHAN, ETHNICITY, "INTRODUCTION," PP. 1-26.

20. BANKS, MULTIETHNIC EDUCATION, CHAPTER 2 ON "ETHNIC REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS AND EDUCATION;" AND NOVAK, RISE OF UNMELTABLE ETHNICS, PART 3, "THE NEW ETHNIC POLITICS."